

Weekend



THURSDAY
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The Civil War in Virginia

Historical society
surveys story from
battlefield to home front

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'An American Turning Point'

Society's exhibit focuses on the Civil War in Virginia



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Virginia Historical Society's Civil War exhibit touches on issues from the battlefield and beyond, featuring items such as this Lefevre James Cranstone painting of a slave auction in Richmond.

BY JEREMY SLAYTON
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Cannon fire rumbled in the distance. On July 1, 1862, the sounds of fighting at nearby Malvern Hill reached Elizabeth T.E. Munford at her downtown Richmond home. She wrote to her daughters that she expected to hear later that night from her son, Confederate Lt. Charles Ellis Munford, who was participating in the Seven

Days' Battle in eastern Henrico County with the Letcher Light Artillery unit. Elizabeth Munford's words proved prophetic as that evening her son's body was brought in a wooden cart directly from the battlefield to the family's home. It's stories like this that the Virginia Historical Society tells with its new Civil War exhibit, "An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia." The 3,000-square-foot exhibition opens Friday.



Elizabeth Munford of Richmond heard gunfire from the nearby battle that killed her son, a Confederate soldier, in 1862.



Lt. Charles Ellis Munford's uniform was returned to his family along with his body.

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"It's such a multifaceted human event that I really hope people come away from this saying, 'I saw an experience I could relate to in some way or empathize with in some way that I didn't necessarily think I would see,'" said Paul A. Levenson, president and chief executive of the historical society.

As the 150th anniversary of the Civil War dawns in America, the historical society tells the story of the war in Virginia from the battlefield and the home front.

At the beginning, it tackles the question: Why did the Civil War happen? The opening words show that the answer does not come easily: "Slavery caused the war, but the war was not begun to free the slaves."



Although nearly 60 percent of the war's battles were fought in Virginia, the exhibition does not entirely focus on the fighting. William M.S. Rasmussen, lead curator and the Lora M. Robins curator at the historical society, said the war is a vast subject and difficult to tell in its entirety.

Instead, the historical society focused on 13 themes related to the war and the people whose lives were affected by it, such as the Munford family, 18-year-old Confederate soldier James E. Hanger and slaves.

"Once you've learned these people's stories, we hope that you'll ... want to learn the stories of other people from that time period," said Andrew H. Talkov, exhibit coordinator. "Our goal is always to produce lifelong learners."



Hanger is thought to be the first amputee of the Civil War. A cannonball tore apart his leg during the first land action of the war at the battle of Philippi, which is now part of West Virginia.

As he recovered, Hanger designed and manufactured a prosthetic leg with a hinged knee and foot. Other amputees — an esti-



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Siah Carter, a 22-year-old slave from Shirley Plantation, rowed out to the USS Monitor in the James River and became first assistant to the ship's cook. Carter served in the Union Navy until May 1865.



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Ambrotype portraits like this one of Pvt. Anthony Sydnor Barksdale in 1861 were popular during the war.

mated 60,000 amputations were performed during the Civil War — soon requested the Hanger limb.

After the war, he formed a company that in 1989 became part of Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics Inc., the country's largest provider of artificial limbs.



The historical society does not shy away from the emotionally raw issue of slavery. An interactive simulation allows people to play the role of someone attempting to

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Congressman John Minor Botts of Richmond was imprisoned for openly challenging the legality of the Confederacy. He later moved to Culpeper County and unveiled a book on the rebellion.

If you go

What: "An American Turning Point: The Civil War in Virginia"

Where: Virginia Historical Society, 428 N. Boulevard, Richmond

When: Friday through Dec. 30

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday; 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays

Admission: Free

Information: (804) 358-4901 or www.vahistorical.org

People you'll meet

John Minor Botts failed to prevent secession in Congress and retired to his Richmond home. The "Southern man with national principles" was arrested and imprisoned for openly challenging the legality of the Confederacy and accused of writing a treasonous secret history of secession.

Jubal Anderson Early argued against disunion at Virginia's 1861 convention. Even after President Abraham Lincoln's call for troops, the Army officer turned lawyer was among 55 delegates who voted against secession, but fought for the Confederacy against the Union he tried to save.

Maj. Alexander T. Augusta received his medical degree from Trinity Medical College in Toronto and was appointed surgeon in the 7th United States Colored Troops. He was assaulted in Baltimore for wearing his officer's uniform and was later transferred to command the Freedman's Hospital near Washington after white surgeons complained about being subordinate to a black officer.

Sally Tompkins appealed to Confederate President Jefferson Davis after Confederate officials ordered the closing of Richmond's private hospitals. She was awarded a captain's commission, the only one granted to a woman. Her 22-bed Robertson Hospital remained open, and 1,300 Confederate soldiers passed through its doors by the end of the war.

Siah Carter rowed a small boat out to the USS Monitor anchored on the James River, seeking freedom with the Union. The 22-year-old slave from Shirley Plantation was taken aboard the Monitor and eventually became first assistant to the ship's cook. He survived the Monitor's sinking on Dec. 31, 1862, and was discharged from the Union Navy in May 1865.

Source: Virginia Historical Society

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